

Book review

Monograph : a Bibliographic Review of *Corynebacterium vaginale* (*H. vaginalis*). By W. E. DUNKELBERG. Second printing, 1975. Pp. 54. Published by Printing Office, Fort McPherson, Georgia, U.S.A.

This is a timely critical annotated bibliography of 54 pages containing brief appraisals of 196 articles on *Corynebacterium vaginale* first published in 1974. Although the book appears at first sight somewhat indigestible, the reader's task is aided very considerably by the preface, which provides a golden thread to understanding by indicating a recommended order of reading.

Although organisms resembling *Haemophilus ducreyi*, which could well have been *C. vaginale*, had earlier been noted in vaginal smears, amongst prostitutes in Japan, the discovery of these organisms is usually attributed to Leopold (1953) writing in a military journal, who described them in men with moderate prostatitis with or without urethritis and in women with signs of cervicitis. From their cultural behaviour a close relationship with the genus *Haemophilus* was suggested. This paper was followed quickly by one in an obstetrical journal by Gardner and Dukes (1955) who reported the occurrence of the organisms in cases of non-specific vaginitis and described the so-called 'clue cells', *i.e.* epithelial cells found in wet mounts which have a stippled or granulated appearance due to the adherence and uniform spacing of the organisms on their surface.

Dunkelberg has made this organism a special interest and twelve of his own references are included. In 1969, in his Ph.D thesis, he concluded from a study of growth requirements that the organism could not be classified as a *Haemophilus* but had characteristics more like those of *Corynebacterium*.

Most of the papers clarify or refute two controversies:

(1) The taxonomic position of *C. vaginale*,

(2) The more pressing question of pathogenicity, which venereologists will regard as of more importance. The third question, namely the sensitivity to antibiotics, must be secondary to (2).

There is a two-thirds majority in favour of pathogenicity, outright or by implication, in the relatively few papers in which an opinion is expressed, including suggestive but not decisive results with human inoculation and the reports of neonatal infections of the foetus and septicaemia of the mother in cases of septic abortion. Dunkelberg (1962) subscribed to the view that the organism was an asymptomatic contaminant, and a Finnish author writing in 1971 believed that it was a biological variant of Döderlein flora. A unifying concept (because of the absence of pus in the discharge) is that *C. vaginale* represents an infection of the secretion rather than inflammation of the vaginal wall, but this nevertheless represents vaginitis because the increased discharge is unpleasant and disturbing to the patient which one author (Gardner) believes causes 'more unhappiness and mental suffering than all genital cancer'.

There is widespread agreement that the organism is spread by genital contact and it obviously therefore deserves continued research. Some papers quoted indicate its finding in cervical cytology smears and it might be of service to venereal disease clinics—at least where research is contemplated—if cytologists could generally be encouraged to look for the organism and indicate its presence when found. This monograph is regarded a 'must' for those who wish to have the reference background in order further to pursue this subject.

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